



J.P. Carr Elementary School

September 18, 2009

On May 21, 2009 a resident of Conyers, Rockdale County contacted the Georgia Division of Public Health (GDPH) about asbestos exposure during the 1960's and 1970's at J.P. Carr Elementary School, and health concerns about people who attended the school. In 2004, she received a letter from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) which stated that the elementary school previously contained asbestos. She claims that there are many former students, (including her sister who died in 2008 of colon cancer) who have or had cancer, and feels that these cancer cases are the result of attending J.P. Carr Elementary School. In addition, she also feels that the asbestos contamination at the school was only covered up and not properly abated.

According to the National Cancer Institute, asbestos is a known human carcinogen (a substance that causes cancer) and studies indicate that exposure to asbestos may increase the risk of lung cancer, mesothelioma (cancer of the thin membranes that line the chest and abdomen), and asbestosis (an inflammatory condition affecting the lungs). Other studies have suggested an association between asbestos exposure and gastrointestinal and colorectal cancers, as well as an elevated risk for cancers of the throat, kidney, esophagus, and gallbladder. However, the evidence is inconclusive.

On May 22, 2009 GDPH staff contacted the resident to obtain more information about her concerns and the history of the school. She read the letter she received from EPA (dated April 12, 2004) that described how regulatory abatement standards were followed during the school demolition and rebuilding in 1980. GDPH staff provided health education to the resident about asbestos and diseases linked to asbestos exposure. The resident stated that most cancer cases were colon, breast, lung, and a few brain cancers. The resident was asked to send to GDPH a list of cancer cases and cases of the three diseases linked to asbestos exposure: asbestosis, mesothelioma, and lung cancer. GDPH staff also inquired about other possible environmental exposures and contamination, but she did not suspect any others.

The Georgia Comprehensive Cancer Registry (GCCR) is a population-based registry that collects, maintains, and analyzes cancer incidence data in Georgia. On June 24, 2009 GCCR sent the resident an analysis of cancer incidence data for her zip code, county, and state. The analysis showed there were an excess number of cases of lung cancer cases among females in the zip code. GCCR did not find any cases of mesothelioma, and no elevated incidence rates for any other cancers associated with asbestos exposure for the most recent five year data set analyzed.

On September 8, 2009 GDPH contacted the resident again and provided a copy of EPA's *The ABC's of Asbestos in Schools*. The resident responded on September 9th, stating she was glad we contacted her again and that she plans to check vital records for more information. To date, we have received no other complaints and the resident has not provided any additional information about cancer cases in her community.

The city of Conyers is located in Rockdale County (incorporated 1870) and approximately 24 miles east of Atlanta on Interstate 20. Conyers is the only municipality in Rockdale County and has a total land area of 11.92 square miles and an estimated population of 13,000. Major employers include construction, accommodation and food services, and healthcare.

GDPH reviewed several sources to determine if J.P. Carr Elementary School was located near any state or federally listed hazardous waste sites. GDPH examined the 2009 Environmental Protection Division's Hazardous Site Inventory (www.gaepd.org), and U.S. EPA's Toxic Release Inventory (www.tri.gov) and Enforcement and Compliance History Online (ECHO) (www.epa-echo.gov). No information about asbestos contamination or other hazardous sites near the school was found.

Everyone is exposed to asbestos during some point in their life. Although low levels of asbestos are ubiquitous in the environment (air, water, and soil), most people do not become ill from this exposure. Individuals who do become ill from asbestos exposure are usually those who are exposed to it on a regular basis, most often in



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industrial jobs where they work directly with the material or through substantial environmental contact.

Lung cancer is one of the most common cancers. Lung cancer is primarily attributed to cigarette smoking and is responsible for most cancers of the larynx, oral cavity and pharynx, esophagus, and bladder. Other risk factors for lung cancer include radon, air pollution, family history, and being over age 65. Secondhand smoke also contributes to the risk of being diagnosed with lung cancer. A new study released in February in the *Journal of Clinical Oncology* states that female never smokers have a higher incidence of lung cancer and have identified the following as potential risk factors:

secondhand smoke; occupational exposures such as asbestos, chromium, or arsenic; environmental exposures such as domestic radon; indoor pollutants; previous lung disease; dietary factors; family history; and genetic factors.

Conclusions

There is no documentation or data linking past asbestos contamination at J.P. Carr Elementary School and current cancer cases among former students. GDPH has no evidence to determine if a past completed exposure pathway exists. Furthermore, an analysis of cancer cases by the GCCR has determined that there is no evidence of elevated rates of cancer from possible asbestos exposure at J.P. Carr Elementary School.